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*Intel after Vietnam*

COVERUP 4-23

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NEW YORK (UPI) -- INTELLIGENCE REPORTS OF THE NUMBER OF ENEMY TROOPS IN VIETNAM IN 1967 WERE INTENTIONALLY KEPT LOW EVEN IN REPORTS TO PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON, ACCORDING TO SECRET DOCUMENTS MADE PUBLIC TUESDAY.

*Source* -- SAM ADAMS, A FORMER CIA ANALYST FOR VIETNAM AFFAIRS, ALSO SAID TUESDAY THAT JOHNSON LATER LEARNED THAT MILITARY INTELLIGENCE HAD UNDERESTIMATED ENEMY STRENGTHS IN VIETNAM BY NEARLY 300,000 MEN. HE SAID HE THEORIZES JOHNSON TOOK PART IN THE COVER-UP AT THAT POINT TO AVOID EMBARRASSMENT.

A SECRET "EYES ONLY" MESSAGE DATED AUGUST 21, 1967, WAS CIRCULATED AMONG VARIOUS OFFICIALS, INCLUDING GEN. WILLIAM WESTMORELAND AND FORMER CIA DIRECTOR RICHARD HELMS, THAT SAID BETWEEN 120,000 AND 130,000 PERSONS KNOWN AS SELF DEFENSE FORCES AND SECRET SELF DEFENSE FORCES WERE BEING INCLUDED IN ESTIMATES OF ENEMY STRENGTHS.

"IF SD (SELF DEFENSE) STRENGTH FIGURES WERE INCLUDED IN THE OVERALL ENEMY STRENGTHS, THE FIGURE WILL TOTAL 423,388 TO 431,491 DEPENDING ON MINOR VARIATIONS.

"THIS IS A SHARP CONTRAST TO THE CURRENT OVERALL STRENGTH FIGURE OF ABOUT 299,000 GIVEN TO THE PRESS HERE (IN VIETNAM)," THE MESSAGE SAID.

THE MESSAGE CHARACTERIZED BOTH DEFENSE FORCES AS CONTAINING A "SIZEABLE NUMBER OF WOMEN AND OLD PEOPLE ... WITH NO REAL DISCIPLINE," AND PRESUMABLY NOT DANGEROUS.

ADAMS, WHOSE ARTICLE ON THE ALLEGED COVER-UP APPEARS IN THE MAY ISSUE OF HARPER'S MAGAZINE, SAID THE TWO FORCES WERE ACTUALLY SNIPERS AND GUERRILLA TROOPS WHO PLANTED BOOBY TRAPS THAT ACCOUNTED FOR THE LARGE NUMBER OF U.S. CASUALTIES WHEN THE UNITED STATES FIRST ENTERED THE WAR.

ONE OF TWO MESSAGES, MADE PUBLIC TUESDAY BY REP. PAUL MCCLOSKEY, R-CALIF., SAID "THE PRESS REACTION TO THESE INFLATED FIGURES IS OF MUCH GREAT CONCERN. WE HAVE BEEN PROJECTING AN IMAGE OF SUCCESS OVER RECENT MONTHS, AND PROPERLY SO; NOW, WHEN WE RELEASE THE FIGURE 420(,000) TO 431(,000), THE NEWSMEN WILL IMMEDIATELY SEIZE ON THE POINT THAT THE ENEMY FORCE HAS INCREASED ABOUT 120,000 TO 133,000."

THE MESSAGE REPORTEDLY WAS SENT TO HELMS, WESTMORELAND, THE FORMER COMMANDER OF THE U.S. MILITARY COMMAND, VIETNAM (MACV), CREIGHTON ABRAMS, DEPUTY MACV COMMANDER, AND VARIOUS OTHER MILITARY COMMANDERS IN THE PACIFIC.

"AT FIRST THERE WAS AN ATTEMPT TO FLIM-FLAM THE PRESIDENT AND THEN AS THE WHITE HOUSE *Approved For Release 2004/11/29 : CIA-RDP77M00144R000500080066-0* IN THE OINTMENT, THEN THE WHITE HOUSE -- I THEORIZE -- STARTED GOING ALONG

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1ST ADD COVERUP NEW YORK XXX ADAMS SAID.

"IN THE CASE OF THE VIET CONG ARMY, I FOUND IN AUGUST, SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER, 1966, THAT THE SIZE OF THIS ARMY WAS TWICE AS BIG -- MORE THAN TWICE AS BIG-- AS THE OFFICIAL ESTIMATE."

"I THINK THERE WAS A TENDENCY TO TRY TO FOOL THE PRESIDENT, JOHNSON IN THE CASE OF THE VIETCONG, AND THEN THERE'S A LATER CASE IN CAMBODIA WITH PRESIDENT NIXON," ADAMS SAID.

HE SAID THE COVER-UP RESULTED IN CHAOS BECAUSE SOME COMMANDERS KNEW ACTUAL TROOP STRENGTHS OF THE ENEMY BUT OTHERS BASED THEIR MILITARY DECISIONS ON THE CONSERVATIVE FALSE FIGURES.

"CONFUSION REIGNED," HE SAID. "THE SHELL GAME HAD BEEN GOING ON FOR SO LONG THAT ONLY A COUPLE OF GUYS KNEW" THE ACTUAL FIGURES AND THE FAKED ONES. "MOST GUYS DIDN'T KNOW," HE SAID.

THIS WAS EVIDENT, HE SAID, DURING THE JAN. 28, 1968, TET OFFENSIVE, THE PLANS FOR WHICH WERE KNOWN TO U.S. COMMANDERS IN NOVEMBER.

"BEFORE THE TET OFFENSIVE, THEY WERE SO BUSY KEEPING THE NUMBERS LOW" THAT VIET CONG ARTILLERY UNITS WERE USUALLY EXCLUDED FROM INTELLIGENCE REPORTS ... SO "OUR PLANS WERE BASED ON THE FACT THAT THE ENEMY WAS ONLY 270,000 STRONG WHEN ACTUALLY IT WAS 600,000 STRONG.

"THE MAIN REASON THAT WE WERE SURPRISED AT TET WAS ... BECAUSE THE PLANNERS DID NOT INCLUDE THE FACT THAT THE VIET CONG WERE UP TO THEIR ELBOWS IN ARTILLERY."

ADAMS SAID THE CIA FINALLY ACCEPTED HIS FIGURE OF SOME 600,000 VIETCONG TROOPS AFTER TET.

THE FORMER ANALYST SAID HELMS SENT JOHNSON A MEMO AFTER TET, TELLING HIM THE ACTUAL FIGURES.

BUT "THE ARMY DIDN'T BUY THAT, SO THEY WENT ALONG WITH THEIR OWN SET OF NUMBERS," AND LATER, THE CIA AGAIN BEGAN TO REPORT LOWER NUMBERS OF ENEMY TROOPS THAN REAL INTELLIGENCE FIGURES SHOWED.

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